

2018 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power (Ex 15:6)

Tips for Preparing the Ecumenical Worship Service

Contents of the Service

This year's worship service includes seven parts:

Gathering: Includes an opening song and words of welcome.

Invocation of the Holy Spirit: A litany/dialogue, with the option for a spoken or sung response by the assembly.

Prayers of Reconciliation: Each of the three petitions of this prayer includes the ritual action of dropping a piece of heavy chain to the ground, followed by a sung or spoken response by the assembly; see the notes below about sourcing this important symbol.

Proclamation of the Word of God: This section includes four passages (including a psalm which may be sung or spoken responsively), the homily/reflection, the song "The Right Hand of God" (see the Hymn Suggestions resource, available on weekofprayer.ca, for the music and text), and a creed / affirmation of faith. If desired, a children's activity could be included in this section of the service (see this year's Children's Resource, available on weekofprayer.ca).

Prayers of the People: These include six petitions, each of which concludes with a spoken response and a symbolic action which contributes to the creation of a human chain ultimately involving the whole assembly (see below for more details on this symbolic action).

The Lord's Prayer: In addition to the assembly saying this prayer together while holding hands, this section may include the singing of a song familiar to your communities, and the exchange of a sign of peace.

Commissioning/Sending Forth: This section includes a spoken litany/dialogue and a closing song/recessional hymn.

For music suggestions for each of these parts, please refer to the Hymn Suggestions resource on weekofprayer.ca. French Hymn Suggestions are available on semainedepriere.ca.

Symbolic Actions in the Service

The worship service as crafted calls for two symbolic actions:

1) Dropping of chains: Three iron chains (or something similar – see below for other suggestions), a very potent symbol of enslavement, dehumanization and racism, are dropped to the floor one by one as each petition of the prayer of reconciliation is prayed.

2) Creation of a human chain: The chains of enslavement are replaced by bonds of communion and united action, symbolized by the creation of a human chain during the Prayers of the People. The human chain is

formed gradually throughout the assembly; as each petition is offered, the leaders connect parts of the assembly to one another until all are joined in a single continuous chain. The human chain remains intact throughout the Lord's Prayer and the singing of a song afterwards (optional). Please refer to the schematic on p. 3 for suggestions of how to create the human chain.

Materials Needed for the Service

1) Bible: It is important to place a visually significant Bible in the midst of the assembly to serve as a symbol of both colonial oppression and the consolation and liberation of the Christian faith. This Bible is to be used for the proclamation of the Word of God (rather than any other booklet or missal).

2) Chains: A total of **3** lengths of chain will be needed for the service, to be used during the Prayers of Reconciliation. As these chains are intended to serve as a powerful symbol of enslavement, they should be as visually and physically substantial as is practical. Hardware or building stores would be a good potential source of heavy iron chain. Should iron chain not be available, some other options include: lighter chain from a hardware store; chain used for lighting fixtures; heavy rope spray-painted black or silver; paper chains made from metallic-looking material (e.g., aluminum foil). If lighter material is used, we recommend that you consult with your musicians to see how they might augment the sound of the dropped 'chains' for greater impact.

3) Materials for Children's Activity: If you wish to include an activity for children within or outside the worship service, you can find a list of materials needed in the Children's Resource, available at weekofprayer.ca.

Worship Leaders Needed for the Service

Leaders are needed for the following elements of the service:

Words of welcome (1)

Invocation of the Holy Spirit (1)

Prayers of Reconciliation (1 leader + 3 persons to read 1 petition each & drop a piece of chain)

Proclamation of the Word of God (3 Scripture readers plus leader for responsive reading of Psalm)

Preacher / homilist (1)

Prayers of the People: (1 leader plus 6 persons to each read one petition and connect one section of the assembly to form a human chain)

The Lord's Prayer (1)

Commissioning/Sending Forth (1)

Depending on the number of churches involved in the worship service, and the number of people willing to take on leadership roles, we suggest you could involve anywhere from 7-20 leaders. The formation of the human chain ideally requires 6 different leaders (who pray one petition each, then connect a part of the assembly), plus the leader who begins the Prayers of the People; hence, a minimum of 7 leaders would be needed (some/all of whom could take on other roles during the balance of the service). The maximum number provided above is calculated based on assigning a different person to each possible leadership role.

Prayers of the people – Forming a human chain

Each intercession is read by a different reader. As each of them finishes, the readers join hands or link arms with members of the assembly, creating a human chain.

If the worshippers are seated in a circle, the simplest way to form the chain will be to have each of the intercessors, following his or her petition, step into well-spaced places in the circle, taking the hands of people on either side, and encouraging others to do the same.

If the worshippers are seated in pews, or in rows, the intercessors can move, following their petitions, and take places linking the two front rows, the first and second rows (on the right side), and so on, as in the diagram below.

Following the introduction to the Lord’s Prayer, the leader of the intercessions can also take a place in the human chain, along with any others who have been involved in the leadership of the service (readers, homilist), until all the members of the congregation are linked.

